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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8623
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4602
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 7471
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3414
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9571
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 004168

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS
NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: LEADING ACADEMIC EXPERT SEES
SOME IMPROVEMENT

REF: A. BANGKOK 03813 (SECURITY FORCES MOVING FORWARD AS
SECTARIAN TENSIONS SIMMER)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 03378 (NEW VIOLENCE STATISTICS MORE
DEADLY AMBUSHES)

[1](#)C. BANGKOK 01390 (UPDATED VIOLENCE STATISTICS FOR
2006)

Classified By: CDA Jim Entwistle. Reason 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Noted southern scholar Dr. Srisomphop Chiphiromsi believes that Army-led arrests of suspected insurgents has led to fewer attacks in the troubled southern provinces and that the overall situation is "more stable." Srisomphop is not yet sure whether this is a short term development or evidence of a sustained improvement in the security situation. He is working to expand the scope of his work beyond cataloguing violence statistics to more comprehensive studies of local attitudes towards the government and separatist movement. Srisomphop acknowledged increased tensions between the ethnic Thai Buddhist and ethnic Malay Muslim communities but said that sectarian attacks remained infrequent and limited to a handful of areas. He also dismissed rumors that insurgent groups were beginning to provide political organization and social services in areas under their control. End Summary.

THE GOOD DOCTOR

[1](#)2. (C) During a July 25-26 visit to the southern provinces of Pattani and Yala, we met with Dr. Srisomphop Chiphiromsi of Prince of Songkhla University (PSU), Pattani campus (Note: septeles will report other meetings and overall impressions. End Note). Srisomphop is the lead scholar in PSU's efforts to develop public information on the violent insurgency under way in the South, and is most famous for being the sole source of reliable statistics on the violence in that region.

A longtime resident of the South, Srisomphop has become an invaluable resource for the government, public and diplomatic community in understanding the conflict. He is currently working to expand the size of his research effort to include new studies on public attitudes, economic conditions and the efficacy of government programs.

"MORE STABLE"

13. (C) Srisomphop's overall assessment is that, over the last few weeks, the situation has gotten "more stable." According to his figures (which will be released in August) there have been fewer incidents of violence in the last two months, which he attributes to the recent surge of arrests. Srisomphop believes that these operations have disrupted the insurgent networks. In his view, the Army is more confident and energetic; local commanders believe that they can solve the unrest. Srisomphop was not sure if this calm is sustainable: "the next few weeks will test" this dynamic. This intervention policy may have an impact on separatists over the long term, but Srisomphop was quick to note that the military must use the justice system to handle those arrested so as to ensure that the process is transparent and seen as just. Srisomphop said that a local Royal Thai Army (RTA) commander recently told him of an RTA request for more assistance from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in handling detainees.

14. (C) Srisomphop said that the RTG is also working to make sure that ongoing projects are having an impact on people's attitudes. These projects range from poverty alleviation to infrastructure construction. When asked about the lack of press reporting on these efforts, Srisomphop agreed that the RTG needs to do a better job of publicizing these programs. PSU will conduct a survey in August on the nearly 200 projects under way in the area. The results of this survey will drive RTG planning on the "peace strategy." In his view, the government is starting to do a better job at improving its image in the South. The military in particular appears to be working hard to build public trust.

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POPULAR ATTITUDES IN THE SOUTH

15. (C) Recently, PSU conducted a survey on popular attitudes in Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, Satun and Songkhla towards specific institutions. Interestingly, Srisomphop said that people expressed the least confidence in the military. The police, who are usually the most widely distrusted, were rated slightly higher than the Army. Of note, the media also received very low marks from locals, who believe that the Thai press misrepresents the situation in the South and overemphasizes violence against ethnic-Thai Buddhists, while painting a negative portrait of ethnic-Malay Muslims. Local Islamic committees, Imams, the Department of Rights Protection from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Forensic Lab headed by Khunying Porntip from MOJ, and the National Human Rights Commission were all widely seen as trusted institutions. The overall justice system received mixed results.

16. (C) When asked about broader attitudes and support for the separatist cause, Srisomphop explained that his center hopes to conduct such a survey later this year. In 2005, PSU polled local people in the three provinces and found that 8 percent supported the separatist cause. In June 2006, the King Prachadipok Institute (KPI) conducted a similar survey with a slightly smaller sample size and found that 18 percent of people supported separatism. Srisomphop noted that the KPI survey was conducted before the violence escalated, suggesting that, in his view, support would likely be lower this year, given widespread anger at the brutality of insurgent attacks.

TRENDS IN VIOLENCE, TACTICS

17. (C) When asked about recent trends in the violence--Srisomphop is finalizing the latest update on his comprehensive violence statistics--he explained that, apart from the recent drop in attacks, 2007 has been marked by more direct attacks on security patrols. More soldiers and police

are being killed. Srisomphop said that separatists were more focused on direct attacks on state officials, after rumors of popular backlash against broader attacks on economic and civilian targets. Srisomphop acknowledged that sectarian tensions remained high, but noted that revenge attacks between the ethnic-Thai Buddhist and ethnic-Malay Muslim communities remained infrequent and restricted to a few specific locations. He made special mention of the rising number of protests and counter protests against security operations; according to his figures, there were only 10 such protests in 2006, but 30 so far in 2007.

18. (C) Srisomphop said that he had seen no evidence of insurgent efforts to provide political organization or social services to the local population. Instead, some insurgent groups were trying to build popular support through direct pleas for such. According to Srisomphop, in recent weeks armed groups of separatists have moved into a handful of villages (Note: he did not specify where. End Note) in the middle of the night, rousted the entire population and led them to the local mosque. Here, the frightened villagers were subjected to a short lecture asking them to support the separatist cause and warning them not to provide aid to the RTG. Srisomphop noted that this was a new tactic and coincided with wider public admission that there is, in spite of previous denials by many, an active, local insurgency.
ENTWISTLE